



The President's Daily Brief

April 22, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

April 22, 1975

Table of Contents

South Vietnam: Further political changes in Saigon may result in Senate President Tran Van Lam being named president of the country. Many military officers believe the situation hopeless. (Page 1)

Laos: Fighting continues in the Sala Phou Khoun area in the north. (Page 4)

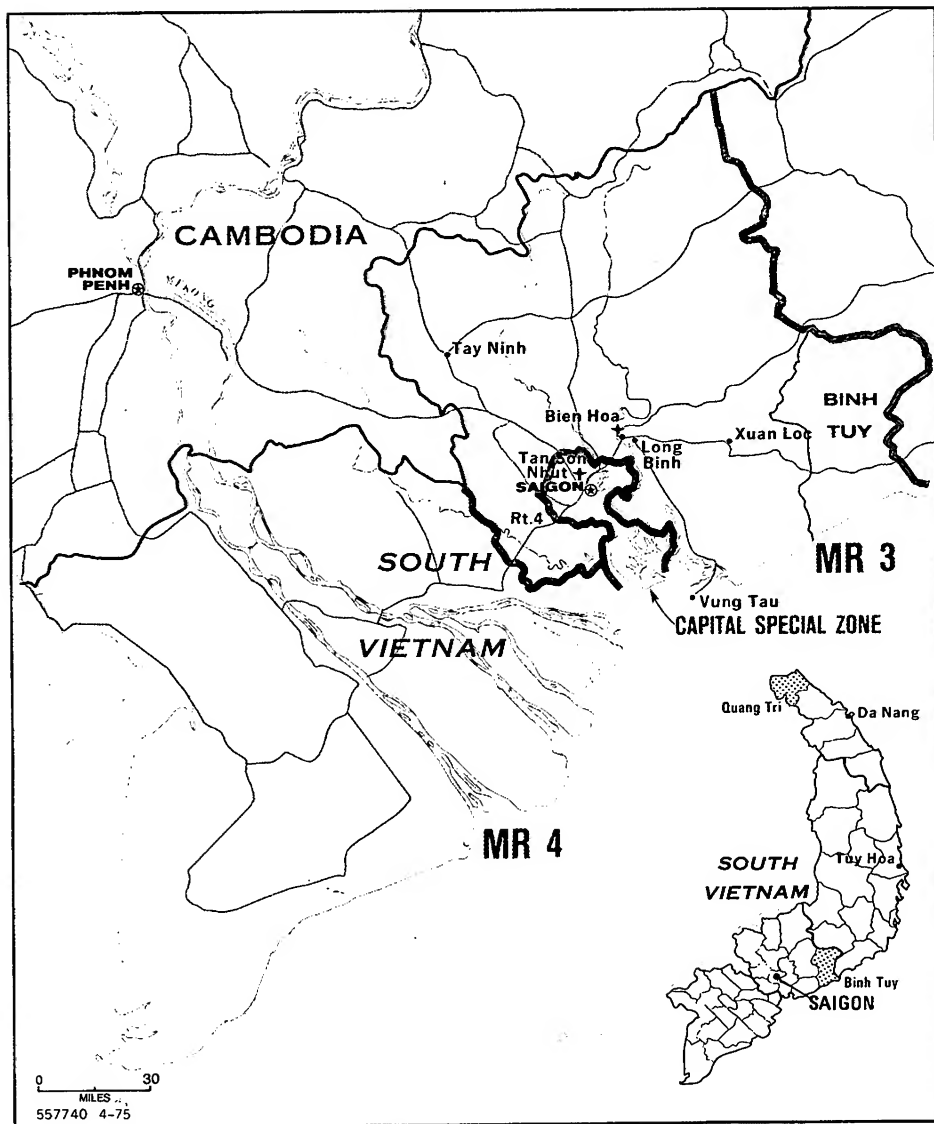
USSR-Egypt: Foreign Minister Fahmy's visit to Moscow appears to have eased tensions somewhat. (Page 5)

Portugal: The political campaign is drawing to a close amid conflicting rumors that a power play before Friday may result in cancellation of the election. (Page 6)

Greece: A large crowd of leftists yesterday damaged the US embassy in Athens. (Page 7)

Notes: Saudi Arabia; Cyprus; Peru-USSR (Pages 8 and 9)

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SOUTH VIETNAM

Vice President Tran Van Huong, who was sworn in as president immediately after Thieu's resignation yesterday, reportedly is also to resign soon to make way for Senate president Tran Van Lam.

Lam apparently intends to form a new government, although there are as yet no indications who will be appointed. Presumably, Lam will turn to such staunch anti-Thieu personalities as General Duong Van "Big" Minh, Buddhist leader Vu Van Mau, and former senate president Nguyen Van Huyen in an effort to encourage the communists to negotiate a political settlement of the war.

The communists have ruled out any real compromise settlement, implying that nothing less than total surrender would be acceptable. Initial communist reaction to the Thieu resignation has continued this line. A Viet Cong spokesman in Paris has been quoted as stating that before negotiations could be considered, the US must "halt all interference in Vietnam" and that not only Thieu "but also his whole regime must be overthrown."

At this point, the very best a new South Vietnamese government might obtain is a negotiated surrender. Given the proximity of communist military forces to Saigon--and the very real prospect of a rapid disintegration of South Vietnamese military will in the wake of Thieu's resignation--time may already have run out for any such orderly transfer of power.

* * *

Communist pressure is being maintained on all sides of Saigon.

Fighting is continuing a dozen or so miles east of Bien Hoa and along Route 4 southwest of Saigon. The roads around Tay Ninh city remain blocked; the communists are shelling Tay Ninh and could easily overrun the lightly defended town at any time. In addition to the now routine artillery fire on Bien Hoa, the communists shelled a number of other government positions.

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The South Vietnamese have reportedly decided to move the two marine brigades south from Bien Hoa to Vung Tau because their discipline has broken down. Government commanders clearly want these units well away from Saigon. This will leave the defense of the Bien Hoa - Long Binh complex to the remnants of the South Vietnamese 18th Division, an armored brigade, and an airborne brigade--all of which have just been pulled back from the Xuan Loc battlefield. The combat effectiveness of these units is questionable, and Bien Hoa could fall quickly.

Many South Vietnamese officers believe it is futile to try to reorganize the defenses of Saigon. They believe the military situation is hopeless, and do not expect the troops deployed along the front lines to hold for long once heavy attacks begin. This gloomy assessment will undoubtedly soon spread to the troops, especially as units retreating from the Xuan Loc battlefield show up and are pressed into the Bien Hoa defensive perimeter.

The North Vietnamese have moved several of their three dozen gunboats south, and these could pose a threat to evacuation by sea. Recent intercepts suggest that some of these gunboats have moved farther south, possibly as far as Binh Tuy Province.

* * *

Information as to how the communists are administering the areas of South Vietnam which recently have come under their control is sketchy. The clearest public statement of communist policy to date was contained in a ten-point manifesto broadcast on April 3 by the Viet Cong's Liberation Radio. It appealed to government civil servants to remain at their jobs and guaranteed that private businessmen could continue their operations.

Limited information on the formation of "revolutionary committees" in cities like Hue and Da Nang indicates that at least a superficial effort in this direction is under way.

The communists are trying to create the appearance of non-communist participation in their new administrations. Aside from this gesture, the new communist administrations appear to have a distinctive military cast, suggesting that some areas have been placed under a sort of martial law.

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The communists are wasting no time in consolidating their control and dealing with any local resistance. Liberation Radio broadcasts of late March included instructions to "severely punish" anyone who was "concocting schemes" to oppose the new administrations.

It is impossible to estimate the scope of purges that have taken place so far, but certain members of the former government, such as the police, are particularly vulnerable. It is unclear whether the first initial executions were acts of local Viet Cong units or part of a systematic policy. An intercept from an unidentified North Vietnamese unit in Quang Tin Province recently ordered that "shooting on the spot" be restricted and that "military tribunals" first be established, suggesting that the North Vietnamese want to control the reprisal process.

In some areas where the Viet Cong traditionally have had a strong foothold, acts of violence do not appear to be prevalent. [redacted]

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[redacted] the provincial capital of Tuy Hoa in Phu Yen Province, Viet Cong officials moved into the city and established administrative control within a day after the government left. Notices were issued to civil servants and teachers to report for work, promising there would be no revenge or punishment. North Vietnamese currency was immediately introduced, and citizens were ordered to exchange their old money. Many of the cadre [redacted] were familiar to local residents and were recognized as individuals who had left Phu Yen with the Viet Minh insurgents in 1954.

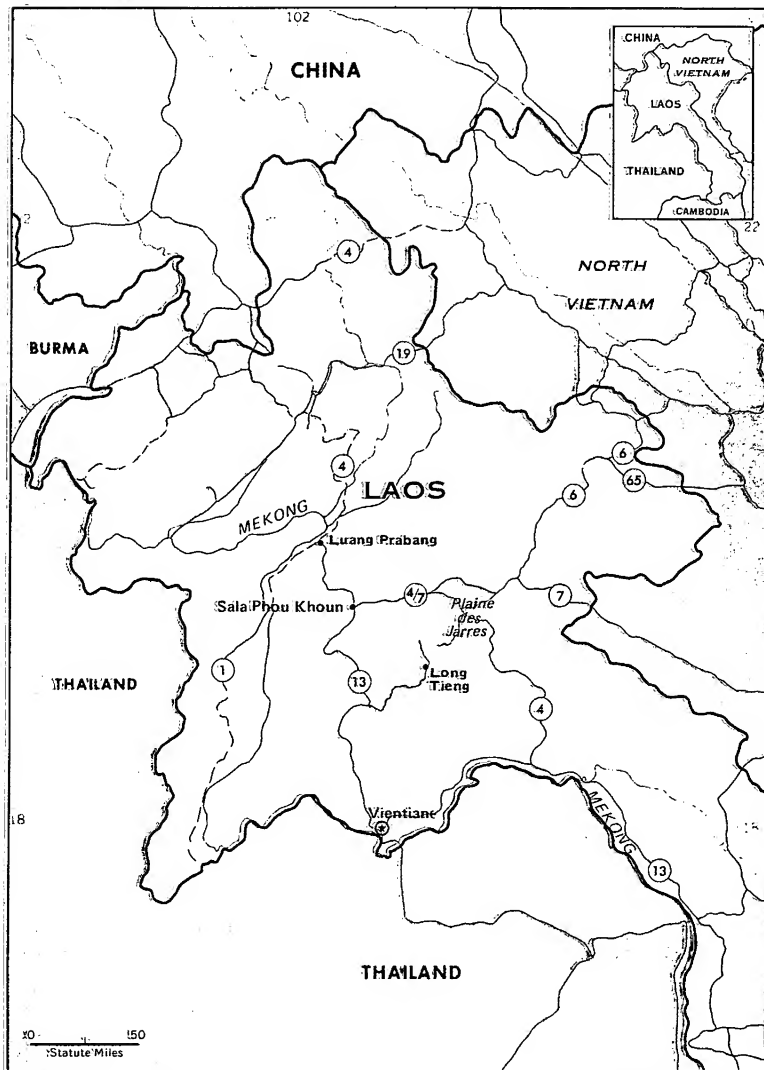
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There is as yet little evidence on the longer term question of whether Hanoi will opt for a relatively quick reunification of the north and south or will choose instead to establish a communist-controlled transitional regime in the south, ostensibly within the context of the Paris Accords.

To date the communists have simply labeled their new administrations "revolutionary committees," and the mix of North Vietnamese and southern communist control and participation is not clear. Hanoi may not have made final decisions on the precise complexion of a successor regime in Saigon.

Northern Laos



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LAOS

Regional commander General Vang Pao's counterattack to recapture positions lost last week east of Sala Phou Khoun has been turned back by stiff resistance from what are described as "several Pathet Lao companies." The abortive counterattack by one Royal Lao army infantry battalion was supported by a dozen air strikes.

Two additional positions manned by non-communist troops at the junction of routes 7 and 13 near Sala Phou Khoun reportedly fell to the Pathet Lao on Sunday.

Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma is apparently becoming more concerned about these developments.

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USSR-EGYPT

Egyptian Foreign Minister Fahmi's visit to Moscow appears to have eased tensions somewhat, but not much progress appears to have been made on troublesome bilateral problems or on reconvening the Geneva conference.

Following a meeting with General Secretary Brezhnev yesterday, Fahmi waxed enthusiastic about progress in Soviet-Egyptian relations. The communiqué winding up the visit was more restrained, however, describing the talks as "friendly" and "businesslike." It failed to show progress on outstanding issues such as debt rescheduling and military aid. Foreign Minister Gromyko pointedly indicated in a speech given during Fahmi's visit that Moscow still views Cairo's independent policies as the major obstacle to improved ties.

On Geneva itself, Moscow and Cairo agreed that careful and serious preparations must precede reconvening the conference. Fahmi said the Soviets thought such preparations could be completed by June. The Soviets made clear that they do not favor an Egyptian suggestion that the conference be expanded to include France, the UK, and at least one non-aligned country.

Moscow and Cairo seemed deliberately to leave the question of Palestinian representation ambiguous. While they called for PLO participation "with the same rights as other participants," they did not specify when the Palestinians should attend nor did they appear to close the door to PLO participation as part of another delegation.

During the visit, Fahmi told newsmen that Egypt now rejects the step-by-step approach to negotiations. He was responding to a question about recent Israeli suggestions that disengagement negotiations might be revived under US auspices. It is not clear, however, whether he was rejecting the concept of a disengagement or simply another publicized round of withdrawal talks.

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The Soviets, meanwhile, will continue preparations for Geneva during the visit to Moscow tomorrow of Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam. Soviet Deputy Defense Minister Kulikov left for Damascus yesterday. He may be seeking to reassure the Syrians of Moscow's military support in order to encourage their attendance at Geneva.

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PORTUGAL

The political campaign draws to a close tomorrow amid conflicting rumors that a power play before Friday may result in cancellation of the elections.

The impending release of a preliminary report of Admiral Coutinho's investigation of the abortive March 11 coup has contributed to pre-electoral tensions. The report is likely to be most damaging to the moderate political parties, especially if they have no opportunity to rebut charges before the election.



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Twelve legal parties, meanwhile, have stepped up political activity in the final days of the campaign. Political violence, which has been infrequent, broke out yesterday between left-wing extremists and members of the center-right Social Democratic Center in northern Portugal. Over 25 people were injured; several were wounded when internal security troops fired to disperse the crowd.

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GREECE

A large crowd of leftists--estimated at 100,000 to 150,000--damaged the US embassy in Athens yesterday in protest of US support for the previous military regime. The demonstrators were eventually driven off by riot police.

The incident marked the first major test in crowd control for a weak government. Prime Minister Karamanlis must avert the kind of chaos in the streets that set the stage for the 1967 military "restoration of order"; he knows the military have been complaining of his "softness" toward demonstrators. The Prime Minister, however, cannot go too far; harsh measures would be likely to cause counter-demonstrations by the left, possibly leading to the fall of the government.

Last night's rally, initiated by youth organizations, communists, Maoists, and other radical leftists, was to commemorate the "black anniversary" of the coup that brought the junta to power in 1967. The demonstration began peacefully, led by the Socialist mayor of Athens. At the US embassy, most of the demonstrators merely shouted and threw paint and firecrackers, but about 500 of them--identified by a senior police officer at the scene as mostly Maoists--broke through police lines and caused considerable damage.

Embassy personnel were evacuated and none was injured. Some 15 policemen were hospitalized and about 25 demonstrators were hurt, according to police estimates.

Early this morning, groups of demonstrators occupied other buildings in the city. Requests by the police for permission to dislodge the rioters have been denied by the Athens city prosecutor.

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NOTES

Saudi Arabian Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister Fahd has assumed control of all significant government business.

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Glaftos Clerides will continue as negotiator for the Greek Cypriot side in the intercommunal talks, thereby making it possible for them to resume as scheduled in Vienna next Monday.

Clerides apparently decided to stay on after President Makarios reaffirmed Clerides' negotiating mandate in the upcoming talks. Clerides noted in a statement last Saturday that in Vienna he would be discussing the Turkish Cypriot plan for a bi-zonal federation as well as the Greek Cypriot proposals for a multi-regional federation. Makarios told Ambassador Crawford yesterday that he wanted the Turkish delegation in Vienna to give specifics on what Ankara is prepared to do in such fields as refugee return, territory, and the powers of a central government.

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Peru has purchased 30 MI-8 helicopters from the USSR, after negotiations with the US ended inconclusively.

Delivery of the Soviet aircraft is scheduled to begin in July. Pilot training for the MI-8s is likely to present problems for Peru. Some Peruvian personnel have begun MI-8 pilot training in the USSR/

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As a result of the helicopter purchase, the small contingent of Soviet personnel now in Peru will probably expand. Heretofore, the USSR has sold land armaments to Peru, chiefly T-55 tanks and other ground equipment.

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